

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 169969

NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEATS BEIRUT 6029 ACTION SECSTATE 9 JUL 76

QUOTE S E C R E T BEIRUT 6029

NODIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, LE, SY

SUBJECT: DIALOGUE WITH SYRIANS RE FUTURE OF WEST BEIRUT

1. AS PART OF OUR DIALOGUE WITH TOP-LEVEL SYRIAN OFFICIALS

CONCERNING

SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON, I RECOMMEND THAT WE ASK SYRIANS WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND OVER COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS RE WEST BEIRUT. WHILE IT IS VERY LIKELY SYRIANS THEMSELVES DON'T YET HAVE A CLEAR ANSWER, RAISING THIS WITH THEM OFFERS US AN OPPORTUNITY TO DRAW TO SYRIAN ATTENTION A NUMBER OF CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING U.S. INTERESTS WHICH THEY SHOULD BE AWARE OF AS THEY PLOT THEIR NEXT MOVES.

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2. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WITH POTENTIAL BREAKDOWN OF ARAB LEAGUE

NEGOTIATING EFFORT AND PATENT UNDESIRABILITY FROM SYRIAN POINT OF
VIEW
OF LETTING LEBANESE SITUATION CONTINUE TO FESTER INDEFINITELY,
SYRIANS
WILL PROBABLY BE FORCED EVENTUALLY INTO EITHER BLOCKADING WEST
BEIRUT
OR ATTACKING IT IN PROCESS OF ATTEMPTING TO BREAK BACK OF PLO. WHICH

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EVER HAPPENS, AND IN VIEW OF SET BACKS WHICH PALESTINIAN MILITANTS
AREJ SUFFERING ELWSEWHERE IN LEBANON, IT IS REMOTELY POSSIBLE
THAT PLO WILL AT SOME POINT CONCEIVE OF AND USE WEST BEIRUT--WHERE IT
REMAINS DOMINANT--AS A KIND OF FINAL REDOUBT. THIS MAY NOT HAPPEN FOR
SOME TIME AND VERY LIKELY NOT AT ALL, BUT IT IS A CONTINGENCY THAT WE
SHOULD NOT WHOLLY IGNORE. ITS IMPLICATIONS WITH REGARD TO THIS
EMBASSY AND AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS IN WEST BEIRUT ARE DISTURBING.

3. AT MOMENT PLO TAKES GREAT PRIDE IN ITS ROLE AS PROTECTOR OF
WESTERN EMBASSIES AND WESTERN INSTITUTIONS IN WEST BEIRUT. BUT
IF PLO CONTINUES TO SUFFER REVERSES AND FINDS ITSELF WITH BACK TO
WALL LITERALLY HAVING NOWHERE ELSE TO GO, PLO'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS
THESE INSTITUTIONS--IN PARTICULAR U.S. EMBASSY AND AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY--COULD CHANGE DRASTICALLY. AS WE ALL KNOW, FUNDAMENTALLY
PLO HAS LONG CONSIDERED U.S. AS ITS ENEMY. EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR,
WHO MAINTAINS CLOSE CONTACT WITH PLO LEADERS IN BEIRUT, REAFFIRMED
TO ME A FEW DAYS AGO THAT THIS CONTINUES TO REFLECT PLO ATTITUDES.
AS LONG AS THINGS ARE GOING WELL FOR IT, PLO REVELS IN THE PRESTIGE
AND STATURE WHICH IT DERIVES FROM ITS ROLE AS PARAMOUNT AUTHORITY
IN WEST BEIRUT. BUT IF PLO FORTUNES SHOULD TURN, WE COULD
CONCEIVABLE FACE PROSPECT OF BEING HELD ITS HOSTAGE.

4. ABSENCE OF PLO PROTECTION IN ITSELF WOULD POSE SERIOUS PROBLEM
FOR US, BUT ACTIVE PLO HOSTILITY TOWARD US, IN ABSENCE OF ALTERNATIVE
SECURITY FORCE, WOULD PUT US IN UNTENABLE POSITION. IN THIS SITUATION
MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS, SUCH AS PFLP, MIGHT TAKE EXTREME
MEASURES AGAINST US. WE WOULD BE IN A VERY DICEY SITUATION.

5. WE WOULD THEN HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO CLOSE DOWN EMBASSY
AND TO TRY TO EVACUATE ALL AMERICANS, BY WHATEVER MEANS POSSIBLE.
IF EMBASSY CLOSES DOWN, SO WOULD AUB HOSPITAL (DR. ASPER,
HOSPITAL HEAD, HAS TOLD ME THIS CATEGORICALLY), AND POSSIBLY AUB
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AS WELL. AUB OFFICIALS ARE CONVINCED THAT ONCE THEY CLOSE DOWN,
HOSPITAL AND UNIVERSITY ARE UNLIKELY EVER TO REOPEN--AT LEAST AS
AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS. AMONG OTHER THINGS, PLO OR LEFTIST
LEBANESE ELEMENTS WOULD IMMEDIATELY OCCUPY ALL BUILDINGS. SINCE
THESE INSTITUTIONS HAVE PROVIDED AN IMPORTANT WINDOW TO THE UNITED
STATES, THEIR SHUTDOWN WOULD REPRESENT A SET BACK TO AMERICAN
INTERESTS. TODAY IN WEST BEIRUT, DESPITE WIDE BELIEF IN U.S.
COLLUSION WITH ISRAEL, PRO-AMERICAN ATTITUDES REPORTEDLY CONTINUE

TO PREVAIL THANKS IN GREAT PART TO THE GOOD WORKS OF THESE INSTITUTIONS.

6. SO WHAT I PROPOSE IS THAT, IN SEEKING TO ELICIT FROM SYRIANS WHAT THEY HAVE IN MIND FOR WEST BEIRUT, WE POINT OUT SOME OF THE FOREGOING CONSIDERATIONS WHICH IMPINGE ON U.S. INTERESTS. WE WOULD CERTAINLY HOPE THAT SYRIANS WOULD DO NOTHING WHICH WOULD ENDANGER LIVES OF AMERICANS IN BEIRUT, OR FORCE CLOSING OF AMERICAN EMBASSY AND AMERICAN PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS. AT MINIMUM WE WOULD HOPE THAT SYRIANS MIGHT ALERT US IN ADVANCE TO ANY POSSIBLE MAJOR MILITARY ACTIONS--EITHER DIRECTLY INTO WEST BEIRUT OR ELSEWHERE--WHICH MIGHT INDUCE A PLO BACKLASH AGAINST AMERICANS. THIS WOULD GIVE US TIME TO GET OUT.

7. I REALIZE THAT WE MAY BE ASKING TOO MUCH OF SYRIANS, WITH WHOM OUR RELATIONS ARE ONLY CORRECT, BUT I THINK WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION AT LEAST TO MAKE SYRIANS AWARE OF OUR INTERESTS AND CONCERNS REGARDING WEST BEIRUT.

8. SUGGEST DEPT REPEAT TO AMMAN, DAMASCUS, JIDDA.

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